DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 758 HE 016 745

AUTHOR Carter, Holly M.
TITLE Making It in Academia: Gurus Can Get You There?
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Asian Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Rank (Professional); *Career Ladders; *Employed Women; Employment Level; Faculty Promotion; *Females; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Mentors; *Minority Groups; Power Structure; Racial Bias; Racial Discrimination; Sex Discrimination; Sex Stereotypes; Social Discrimination; Women Faculty

ABSTRACT

The importance of a mentor relationship in academia, especially for minorities and women, is discussed. After briefly considering the nature of the mentor relationship, the structure and function of success in academia are assessed, and variations of the mentor relationship that may be viable for minority and women faculty are suggested. Two views expressed in the literature concerning the mentor-protege relationship are that institutional barriers have precluded the advancement of minority and women academics both at an institutional level and within their disciplinary field; and that the minority and women professionals do not advance in their work because of their internal psychological factors. The literature also suggests that the mentor-protege relationship functions best when both parties share common values, goals, and perceptions about the world. Some women and minorities who have reached top ranks are not available to be mentors because they see the relationship as paternalistic/matriarchal or as promoting dependency, or because they feel junior professionals should work hard and make it on their own. Attention is also directed to options for providing access to the mentor relationship and for the passage from protege to colleague status. (SW)

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MAKING IT IN ACADEMIA: GURUS CAN GET YOU THERE?

Holly M. Carter, Ph.D.
Center for Asian Studies
College of Arts and Sciences

Northeastern University

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Paper presented as part of a symposium, The Academic Mentor: Guru, Gatekeeper, or Guide, at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982. Copies of the paper are available from Holly M. Carter, Associate Professor, Center for Asian Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115.

Introduction

The percentage of minority persons and women entering academia increased markedly during the mid-1960's. This increase was due largely to the demands made on the system for greater representation of those segments of the society previously denied access to professional opportunities and career mobility. Given this increase one would expect to find increased numbers of minority persons and women holding senior positions in academia. This observation is based on the assumption that fifteen years is a sufficient period of time for an individual to enter academia, successfully gain tenure, and progress through the professorial ranks to the status of full professor. In fact, however, fifteen years later we find that the number of minority persons and women who have actually "made it" in academia has decreased significantly. For example, in the fields of science and engineering, we find that, among all faculty who received their doctoral degrees between 1970 and 1974, only two percent of the women have reached the rank of full professor. This figure compares to a 4.4 percent rate of "success" for their white male counterparts. Minority men and women faculty in the sciences earned degrees at rates of 5.2 and 2.2 percent respectively. Their representation in the ranks of full professor appears to be within the range of their white counterparts (AAAS News, 1978). Though the data may be complex, it is important that we identify the reasons underlying these variations.

This paper argues that in academia, especially for minority persons and women, a mentor relationship is not merely desirable, it is absolutely nec-

essary. Philosophical issues aside, given the power structure and political relationships characteristic of postsecondary institutions, a successful academic career requires sponsorship and support. If one assumes that mentor relationships are necessary, then the important issues become not whether or not to have them, but rather why mentor relationships have not worked well for minority persons and women, and then, more critically, how the mentor relationship might be modified or redefined to function more effectively for minority persons and women. We begin this discussion with a definition of the term "mentor" and a brief discussion of the nature of the mentor relationship.

The Mentor

Recently there has been much emphasis placed on the concept of mentorship and career development (Levinson et al., 1978; Mokros et al., 1981; Schmidt and Wolfe, 1980; Shapiro et al., 1978). This emphasis has resulted in attempts to systematically analyze what has for years been referred to within all the professional fields as the "old boy system." Schmidt and Wolfe (1980:45) define a mentor as a colleague or supervisor who actually provides guidance, support, and opportunities for the junior professional. Others have conceptualized mentors as "godfathers" or "rabbis" (Kanter, 1977). Elsewhere we find the mentor described as a senior sponsor for young proteges (Shapiro et al., 1978:55). Levinson provides us with perhaps the most mystical functional description of the mentor as one who supports and facilitates the "realization of the dream." And, finally, Schmidt and Wolfe (1980) describe the mentor as an interpretor of the formal and informal political (power) dynamics of the organizational setting.

Each of these definitions implies that the mentor must be senior (i.e.,

someone who has gained experience and knowledge as a function of having successfully made it through the system) and powerful (i.e., someone who is able to influence the system in such a way as to facilitate the successful passage of younger proteges through the system).

Levinson et al. (1978) suggest that the term "guru" provides a more subtle description of the mentor. Traditionally the guru has been regarded as a "wise, old man" who has knowledge based on experience. He is also perceived as being powerful or as having access to power, not merely interpreting power. In addition, the guru is often characterized by his followers or disciples. To both the guru and his disciples, being a guru is a way of life and becomes a meaning for life itself. The guru provides the standard of correctness by which the disciples learn acceptable behavior, attitudes, and value patterns. While, as Levinson et al. observe, there are other connotations of the term guru (i.e., the more mystical and divine notions) which do not belong in a discussion of the mentor as guru, clearly the characteristics of the guru presented above provide us with a vivid, functional description of the mentor, particularly as mentors function in academia. (The point here is that the concept of the mentor as having the experience, as being the font of knowledge, is most applicable to academia where knowledge is perceived as power. This is not to deny the applicability of the term outside of academia in the private corporate sector and elsewhere.)

Levinson et al. (1978) regard the mentor relationship as "one of the most complex and developmentally important" relationships a man can have in early adulthood. The mentor-protege relationship represents perhaps one of the most pure symbiotic relationships between non-familial human beings.

Some have suggested that it is the protege who initiates the mentor relationship and not the mentor (Shapiro et al., 1978:53; Schmidt and Wolfe, 1980:40; Stein, 1981:2; Lee et al., 1981). However, a more accurate representation would be that it is a cyclical process where mutual selection occurs. Both the mentor and the protege tend to select the other on the primary basis of extension of self. Festinger (1954) provides support for this observation in his examination of social comparisons. He states that an individual can only function effectively as an evaluative standard for other individuals when there are similarities of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and values. If we apply this concept to a mentor relationship, the mentor can be said to serve as a standard of correctness by which the protege evaluates performance and in terms of which his own performance is evaluated. Then the functional nature of the mentor-protege relationship is further explained.

Empirical findings and observations provide further illustrations of the characteristics of the mentor-protege relationship (Fleming, 1978; Schmidt and Wolfe, 1980). While much of the literature stresses the importance of the mentor-protege relationship in career development, it must also be noted that success in mentor-protege relationships seems assured only when both partners in the relationship are white males. Levinson et al. (1978) found in their study that the mentors were almost exclusively male and, inferentially, white. Clearly, in academia, this finding still holds true. It should therefore be obvious why and how the mentor relationship has been so beneficial for white males in academia, and, further, why the literature should stress so consistently the critical importance of the mentor relationship in career development. At the same time, the literature documents a glaring reality concerning the lack of successful mentor

relationships for young minority persons and women. In fact, in the case of relationships for young minority professionals, whether in academia or not, the subject has received little attention, and what attention has been given presents a gloomy picture. Recently, more has been written about mentoring relationships for white females (c.f., Cook, 1979; Lee et al., 1981), but, again, the findings seem to indicate that the mentor-protege relationship has not been as successful in supporting career advancement in academia for white women as it has been for their white male counterparts. What then can we say about the mentor-protege relationship as it serves minority persons and women in academia? One clear question is why has the mentor-protege relationship functioned so well for white males in academia and so poorly for minority and women academics? Some of the answers to this question are implicit in our discussion of the definition and nature of the mentor-protege relationship. However, significant gaps remain. These are addressed below.

The Mentor-Protege Relationship for Minority and Women Academics: Perceptions and Realities

While white males in academia have continued to "make it" with the support of mentor relationships, their minority and women counterparts have fared so poorly that the term "revolving door" has been used to describe the experience of these "nomads" in academia (Moodie, 1980). In order to seek more definitive answers as to why the mentor-protege relationship does not necessarily result in professional development and success for minority and women academics, we must examine more closely how the mentor-protege relationship has been defined and perceived, and how it has functioned for these groups.

As we have seen, the mentor relationship has been defined in the literature as supportive, advisory, and generally positive in promoting career development. Yet, if we review the literature on the subject produced by minority persons and women (Shapiro, 1978), we find the mentor relationship defined and perceived as "paternalistic," "elitist," "colonialistic," and "dependency-oriented." Further, we find in many of the studies a rejection of the mentor-protege relationship as a viable means to successful career development in academia. In the analyses of the mentor-protege relationship produced by minority persons and women, we can identify two major categories of discussion. The first category points to the systemic inhibitors which have precluded the advancement of minority and women academics both at an institutional level and within their disciplinary fields. In other words, it is the system which creates institutional barriers to the professional development and career advancement of minorities and women. Race and sex discrimination rank high as systemic institutional barriers.

Estler (as cited in Shapiro et al., 1978) describes "filter points" at which a disproportionate number of women (and presumably minorities) are screened out of professional advancement. And Epstein (1970, 1971), in her brilliant work on women and achievement, suggests that there are no objective tests for professional competence at high levels. Status judges of the profession, she observes, bestow the crown of competence on those who teach the young professional. And, those who lead the profession (i.e., the mentors) usually agree upon which "appropriate" candidates are competent and will later become even more competent. They further pass judgement on which candidates are inappropriate and can never become competent. Epstein suggests that aspiring professional women often fall into the latter category based on early

socialization patterns and the lack of systemic support in the woman's later years. Again, we can assume that this observation would hold equally true for minority professionals.

The second category of discussion on the mentor-protege relationship takes the position of blaming the victim. DiSabatino (1976) identifies the four most common inhibitors of advancement for minority and women professionals.

> Even if...external (systemic) factors could be counteracted by laws requiring different hiring practices and promotional decisions, the resulting freedom would be illusory. There would remain barriers to occupational advancement for women that are even more detrimental to women and their vocational aspirations. Internal factors inhibit women's expression of the kinds of achievement-directed behavior necessary to ensure promotions...Some of these internal psychological factors are fear of failure, low self-esteem, role-conflict, and the perceived consequences and incentives for engaging in achievement-related behaviors (DiSabatino, 1976:43).

Banks, McQuarter, and Hubbard (1978), in their study of the social-cognitive basis of achievement orientation in the black population, suggest that distrust can lead aspiring black professionals to the assumption that positive professional values observed in dissimilar persons [white (males)] are inappropriate. Consequently, junior Black professionals might lessen their effort directed toward professional advancement (Banks et al., 1978:391).

Each argument has its validity and this examination of the mentor-protege relationship in academia does not attempt to refute either of these positions. However, our review of the literature seems to suggest that the mentor-protege relationship is a critical factor in professional advancement in academia. It is not the mentor-protege relationship itself, considering the nature of the relationship normatively, which has not functioned effectively for minority and women professionals in academia. It is rather

that the mentor-protege relationship functions most effectively when the mentor and the protege share common values, attitudes, goals, and perceptions of the world. When any or all of these similarities are absent in the relationship, the functional effectiveness seems to decrease significantly in most instances. Thus, one should not assume that a mentor-protege relationship which has a white male in the role of mentor can function similarly and effectively with a white women, or, least of all, with aspiring minority professionals (Levinson et al., 1978:98). Such a relationship carries with it negative social baggage which can become an insurmountable barrier for both the mentor and the protege. The present white male dominated society has cast both minority persons and women in the status of what Epstein (1971) calls "second class citizenship." The mentor-protege relationship, though necessary for professional success, can produce the wrong mix of actors serving to reinforce this social reality rather than to dismiss or change it. We must ask then, can minority and women professionals in academia use the present, white male-dominated mentor-protege relationship in such a way as to break through the social, political, and institutional barriers and "make it?"

Perhaps one could postulate that the most simple answer to this query lies in increasing the numbers of minority and women faculty (both within institutions and across disciplines) who are in a position to and are willing to serve as mentors. However, this answer remains beset with complexities. Levinson et al. (1978:98) suggest that the few women, and again one can include minority persons, who have "made it" become too involved in or overwhelmed by the struggle for survival and maintaining success to assume the responsibilities of the role of mentor or guru to younger, aspiring women and minority junior professionals. Epstein takes this view one step further with

her observation that success for women is illusory. She suggests that women at the top are in fact at the bottom of the top; that women remain on the periphery of the elite with no real power or influence; that even top-ranking women are not really in and of the elites in their respective professional fields (Epstein, 1974:14). We must also acknowledge those successful minority and women professionals who carry with them the social baggage and negative connotations of the mentor relationship and therefore refuse to assume the supportive, power-brokering role for younger professionals. These individuals fall into two major categories. The first consists of those who hold fast to the notion that the mentor-protege relationship is dependency-oriented, paternalistic (or perhaps matriarchal) and colonialistic and thus refuse to "become a part of the system." In the other category are the minority and women professionals who, having made it on their own, deny the existence or the necessity of the mentor-protege relationship as a factor in success. They feel that aspiring junior professionals, to prove their willingness to "work hard" for success, should take the same "hard knocks" that they took <u>alone</u>. In both cases these successful minority and women professionals perceive themselves as elites and do not realize that they are on the periphery of the system. Or, if they do realize it, feel self-righteously "pure" and refuse to jeopardize their positions by assuming what they perceive to be "paternalistic," mentor-guru characteristics. Whatever the rationale, these minority and women professionals remain outside of the mainstream and tend to be unable to transform their accomplishments into effective power or influence. These professionals fail to recognize a key point made by Schmidt and Wolfe (1980): that the mentor-protege relationship is just as important for the mentor as for the protege.

Ultimately the system says, and this is particularly true in academia, that you have not "made it" as a professio- unless you have been acknowledged as a mentor/guru. To settle for anything less (i.e., the role of system informant, network organizer, or guide) is to settle for something short of success. These roles may be deemed by some to be necessary for successful career development for minority persons and women in academia, but sponsors, gatekeepers, network organizers, or guides, though they may have access to information concerning the political dynamics of academia and the ability as well to channel that information, do not manipulate actors or wield the power. In other words, these individuals may gain access to the map which leads to the gate of success, or become the organizational gatekeepers, but their positions are still far short of the mentor/guru who _is_ the standard for correctness, _the_ definition of success.

Some may choose to argue that a system which requires a mentor-protege relationship as a means to professional success is discriminatory, paternalistic, and even nondemocratic (Shapiro _et al._, 1978:56). This paper does not attempt to present arguments counter to this view. Instead our goal here is to acknowledge the system for what it is and, assuming this base line, to suggest ways in which minority and women professionals can function and succeed most effectively.

Functional Realities of the Mentor-Protege Relationship: Success for Minority and Women Faculty

It has been established that the mentor-protege relationship functions most effectively if both actors share common values and attitudes. However, we know at the outset that achieving this basic criterion is highly unlikely in

mentor-protege relationships where sex and/or race are factors. Yet Levinson et al., (1978) assert that the mentor relationship may be seriously flawed or limited and yet be beneficial (Shapiro et al., 1978:100).

In our attempt to identify valid, pragmatic options for achieving functionally effective mentor relationships for minority and women professionals in academia, we focus our attention on the critical factors: 1) access to the mentor relationship; and, 2) passage from protege to colleague status.

Access to the Mentor Relationship

Given the predominance of white male mentors in academia, it is understandable that junior minority and women faculty might choose not to enter the mentor relationship, or that they might not be chosen as a protege. Yet, women and minority junior faculty must bear in mind that the access of white male junior faculty to a mentor relationship is no more assured. There are, however, structural variations of the mentor-protege relationship from which minority and women faculty can select and benefit from professionally. Several of these options are briefly discussed below.

Through symbolic mentorships (Levinson et al., 1978:100), junior women and minority faculty have the opportunity to observe academia function without locking themselves into a relationship which they deem condescending or colonizing. The goal in this instance is to become primarily associated with a body of knowledge or a school of theorists which best approximates the junior faculty person's perception of the world without the formal association of a mentor. Through this type of mentor relationship, the junior minority or women faculty member assumes an identity in the discipline within an "accepted" framework without compromising personal integrity. However, both the

responsibility of initiating entry to and maintaining professional development within the academic discipline remains with the junior faculty member.

Another option would be for minority and women faculty to initiate mentor relationships with a variety of mentor personalities. This concept is closely aligned with what Bucher and Stelling (1977) refer to as "selective role modeling." Within this type of mentor relationship the primary goal is to use multiple mentors to gain professional identity, political savvy regarding institutional and discipline norms, entry into professional circles, and sponsorship for professional development. Here again young minority and women faculty are not placed in the position of being identified as a "disciple" of one mentor but rather gain the flexibility of designing a mentor relationship which best suits their individual professional needs and personal values.

A final option for minority and women faculty is to identify senior minority and women faculty who either have "made it" or who are close enough to this end that they are willing to, and are in a position to, assume the responsibilities of a mentor relationship. Clearly, the number of potential minority and women mentors is miniscule relative to their white male counterparts. But they do exist. Indeed establishing a mentor relationship with junior faculty may be the key which facilitates the transition for these senior faculty members from the periphery to the mainstream of professional recognition within their academic field.

Passage From Protege to Colleague Status

Minority and women junior faculty do not differ from their white male counterparts in terms of the necessity for and the rigor of the "rites of passage" from protege to colleague. Race and sex are undeniable barriers, but ultimately the system and institutional requirements are constant. In many

instances minority and women faculty are "locked in" stereotypic applications of theory on the social plight of minorities and women. In some instances, however, minorities and women opt out of theoretical inquiry, claiming its irrelevance to their values and/or professional aspirations. While this commitment to the "cause" is exemplary, it cannot and should not be separated from the rigors of theoretical inquiry in academia. To be recognized as a success in academia is to be recognized as accomplished in a full range of theoretical and methodological inquiry. The system may require higher standards based on race and sex, but this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a phenomenon that is likely to change unless the key actors (white male mentors) also change.

If minority and women faculty seek to make the academic system a more egalitarian one, they must be a part of the system and not on its periphery, whether by choice or by exclusion. The traumas of the sixties are evidence of the fact that system change cannot be externally orchestrated. The gains are ad hoc and usually short-lived. As with other social systems, the academic institution is first and foremost self-maintaining. It is particularly unresponsive when demands for modification and change originate as external stimuli. If system change is a desired goal for minority and women faculty, above and beyond their individual professional success aspirations, their participation is required. Active involvement is the only alternative. Epstein (1970, 1971, 1974) notes the significant number of women who "drop out" at the peak of their professional careers, allegedly due to their fear of success. These professional women have made the transition from protege to colleague yet do not stay on to reap the full benefits of their toil. Minority professionals in academia, on the other hand, seem in constant professional motion, moving from one career or position to another in search of success.

Clearly, this is not the solution to the problem of system change or individual professional success.

Conclusions: On Becoming A Mentor

Minority and women faculty have experienced and will, in all probability, continue to experience a range of obstacles in their search for professional development in academia. This point is presented purely on the basis of the author's observation of the movement of colleagues from professional ranks to administration within academia or out of academia. In many instances, this professional move occurs as a result of unsuccessful tenure review. Yet, there seems to be an increasing trend toward administrative positions where salary and, presumably, power and influence are perceived to be greater. We have been confronted with the realities of the superimposed significance of race and sex in professional development. We have been confronted with the insurmountable odds of developing our careers while bucking the system. The victims of this struggle have been numerous, as our decreasing numbers attest. It is difficult to review the carnage and not resort to philosophical treatises on the importance of or need for system participation--and for success. Indeed this paper may not be regarded as anything other than such a discussion. However, the objective of this discussion is far more basic. If mentor relationships are regarded as critical factors for success (and the literature seems to support this observation), then minority and women faculty must participate in these relationships if they are to succeed in academia. We have attempted further not only to engage in systematic, pragmatic assessment of the structure and function of success in academia, but also to present variations of the mentor relationship which will hopefully be regarded as viable

alternatives for aspiring minority and women faculty. It is imperative that we succeed in academia, become mentors, and, as such, achieve the power and influence to redefine the system. The connotations we hold of the mentor relationship are the result of the manner in which the present, predominantly white, male mentors have defined the relationship. This definition can only change if the characteristics of the mentor change.

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